

Compensation: Virginia Senators and Delegates

Study resolution

- Review compensation provided to General Assembly members
 - examine the history of legislative compensation
 - review the compensation, expenses, and benefits for legislators in other states
 - assess the methodologies for determining reasonable legislative compensation, including tying salaries to certain indexes or economic indicators
 - obtain the input of legislators by conducting surveys

Senate Joint Resolution 17 (2024)

Legislators receive various forms of compensation, reimbursement, and allowance

	House of Delegates	Senate
Base salary	\$17,640 / year	\$18,000 / year
Interim meeting compensation	\$300 or \$400 / day of meeting(s)	
Session per diem	\$213 / day (<i>\$237 / day for 2025</i>)	
Mileage reimbursement	\$0.67 / mile	
District office allowance	\$1,250 / month	

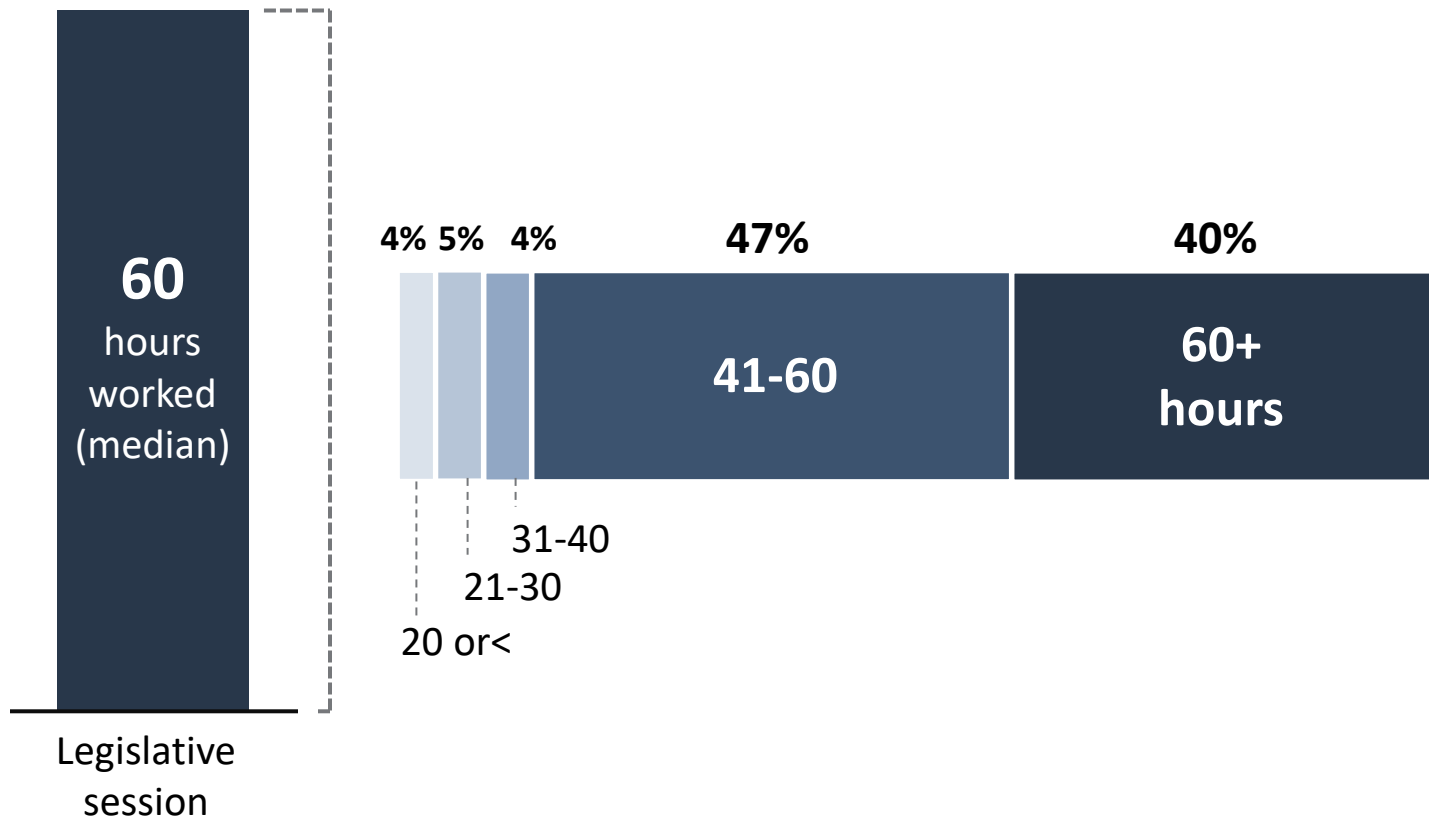
In this presentation

Legislative workload

Legislative salaries

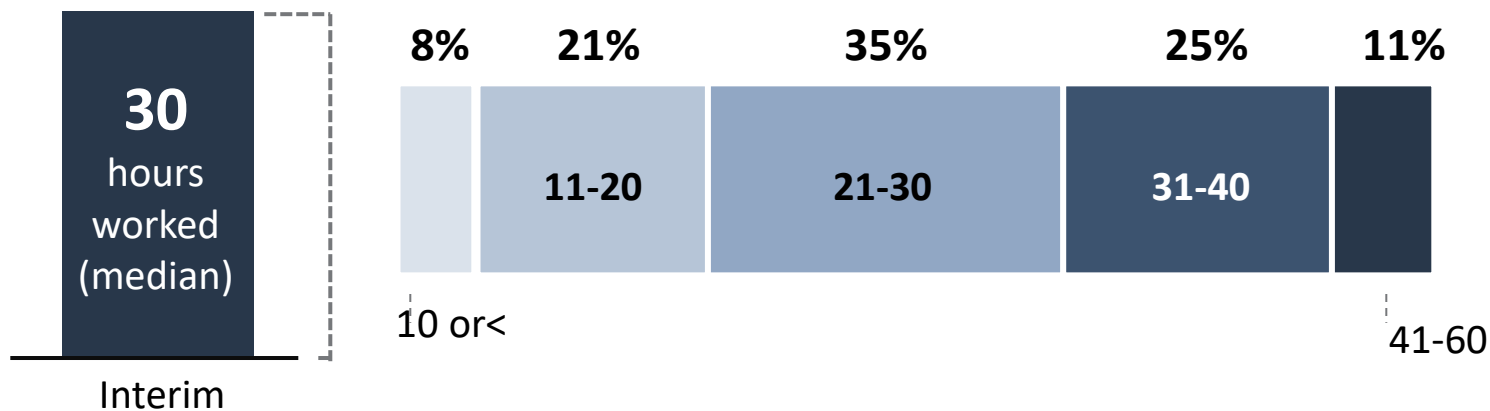
Legislative reimbursements and allowances

During the legislative session, members estimated working a median of 60 hours per week



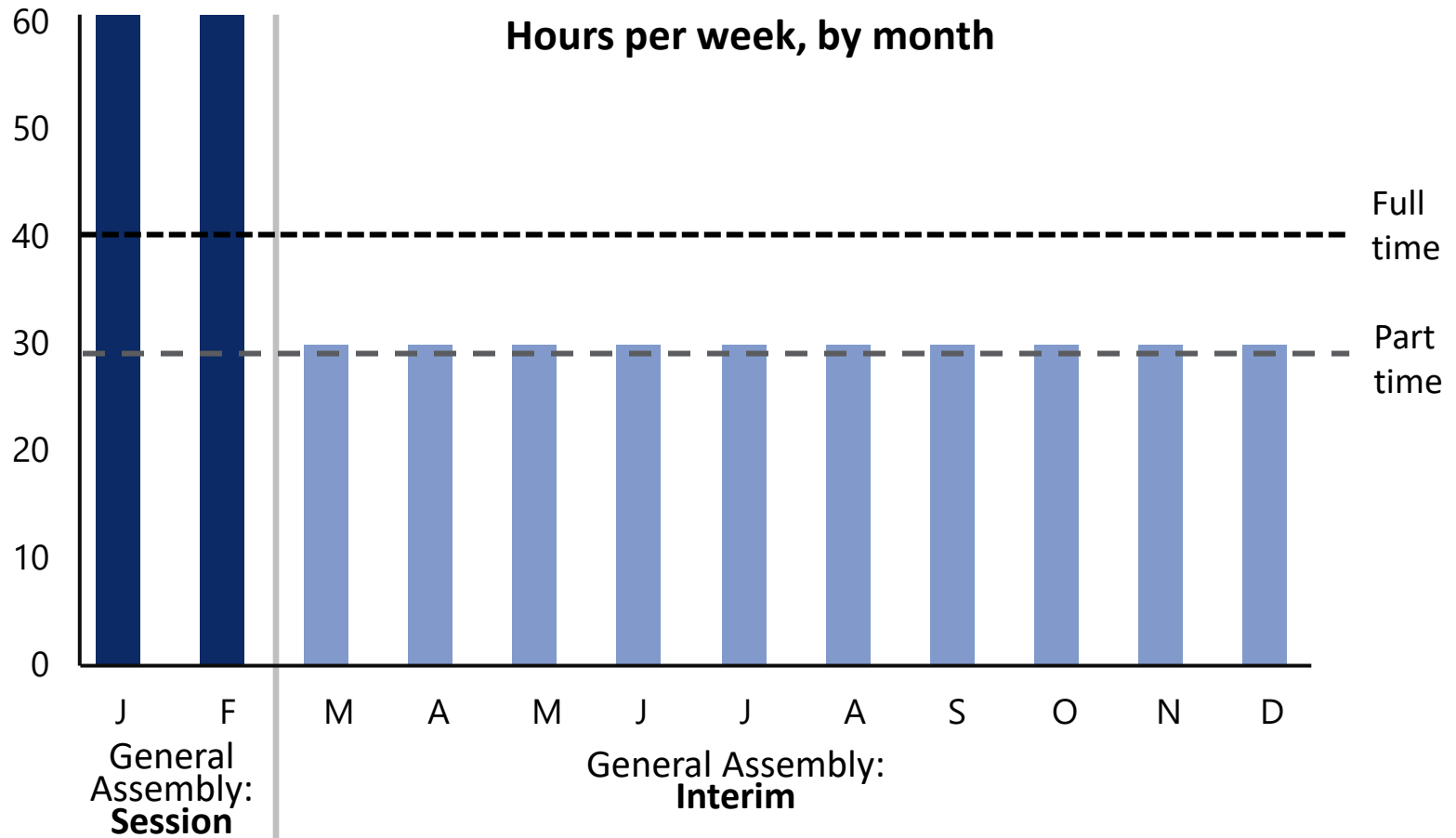
Source: JLARC survey of Virginia legislators, November 2024. 120 responses out of 140 Virginia legislators; 86% response rate.

During the interim, members estimated working a median of 30 hours per week



Source: JLARC survey of Virginia legislators, November 2024.

Legislators work more than full time during session, similar to upper end of part-time workers in interim



Note: Internal Revenue Service defines part time as less than 30 hours per week.

On an annual basis, members work close to a traditional full-time job on legislative responsibilities



Note: Assumes 2,080 annualized full-time employee hours; holidays and leave excluded from calculation.

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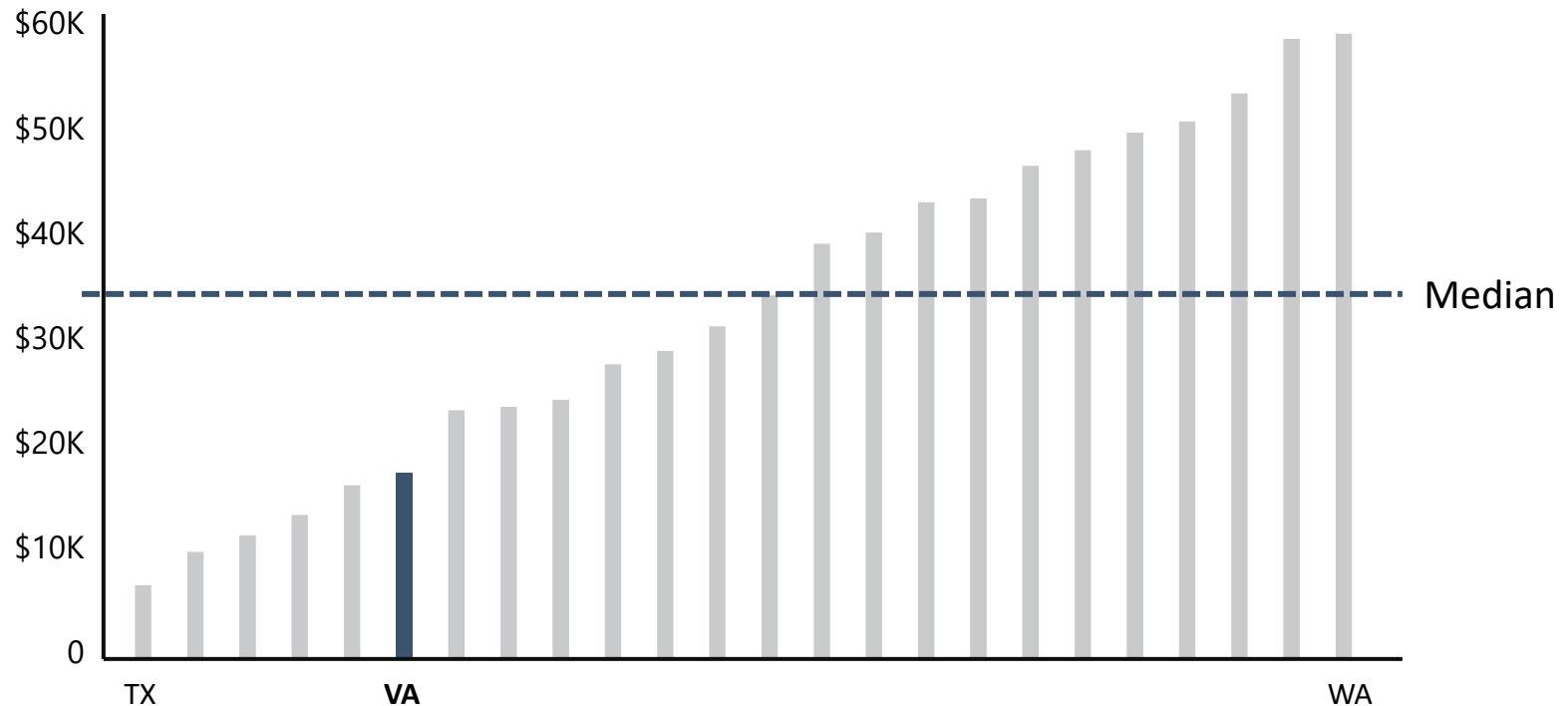
Legislative reimbursements and allowances

Several benchmarks provide insight into adequacy of Virginia legislative salaries

- Other state legislative salaries, especially those classified along with Virginia as “hybrid” by the National Conference of State Legislatures
- Value of salaries over time relative to inflation

Note: NCLS classifies 26 state legislatures, including Virginia, as “hybrid” based on (i) amount of time in session, (ii) administrative support legislators receive, and (iii) level of legislative compensation.

Virginia legislative salaries are on the lower end of states with legislatures classified as hybrid



Note: VA House salary (\$17,640) is 90% below median of salaries in other “hybrid” legislatures. Senate salary (\$18,000) is 86% lower than the median.

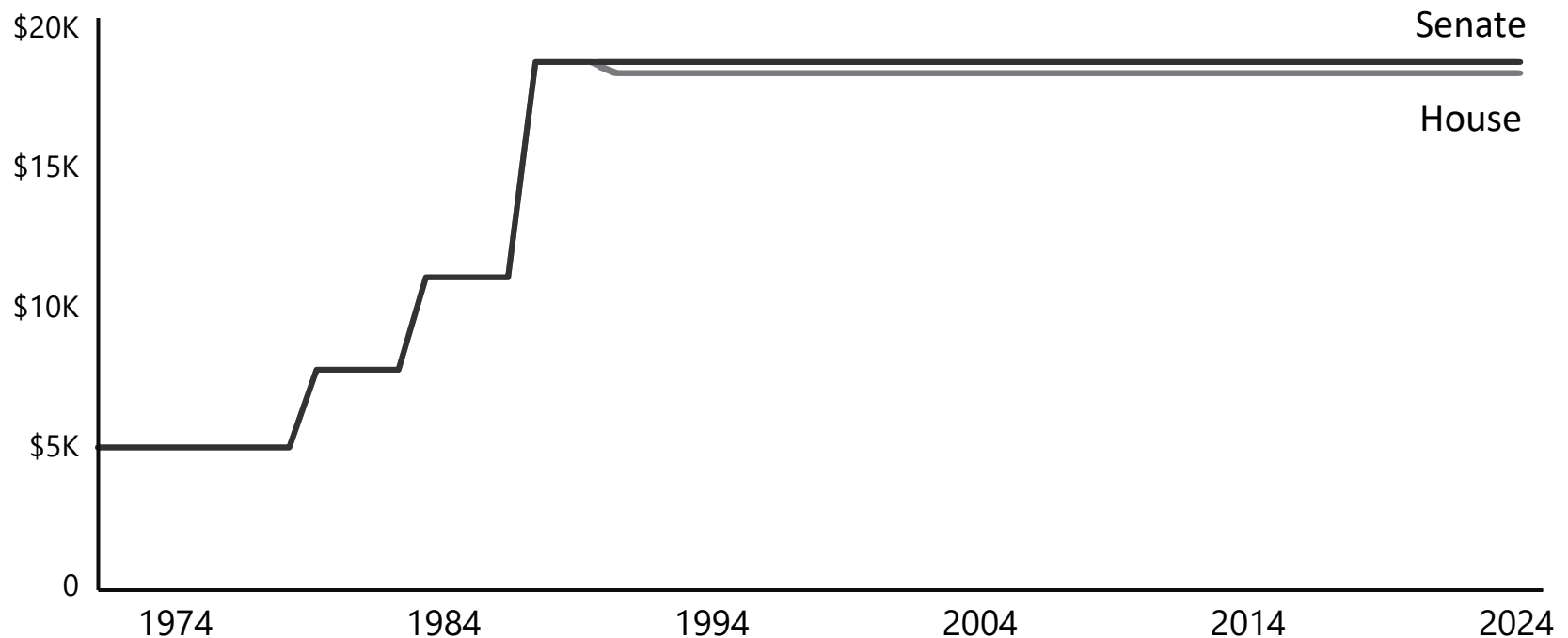
Source: National Conference of State Legislatures

Salaries of legislators in other states in the region vary widely

- Median legislative salary across the region* is about \$22,000—19% more than Virginia's
- Difference is heavily driven by Delaware (\$50,678) and Maryland (\$54,437)
- Virginia's salary is more in line with other states in region but much higher than South Carolina (\$10,400)

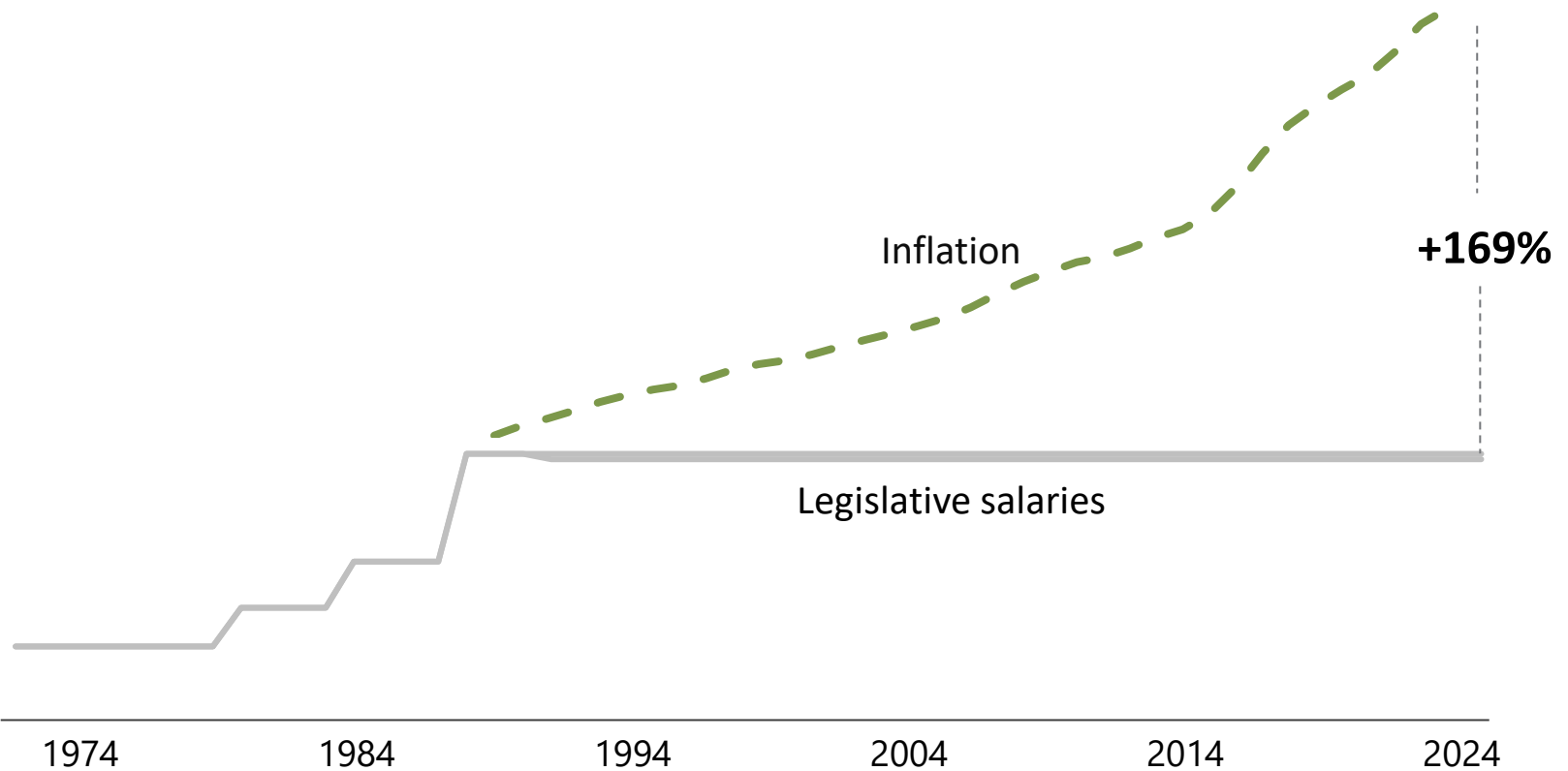
*States included in region: Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Legislative salaries in Virginia have remained the same since 1988



Note: The House of Delegates decreased its salary by 2% during a recession in 1991.

Legislative salaries in Virginia have lost almost 170% of their value since last increase

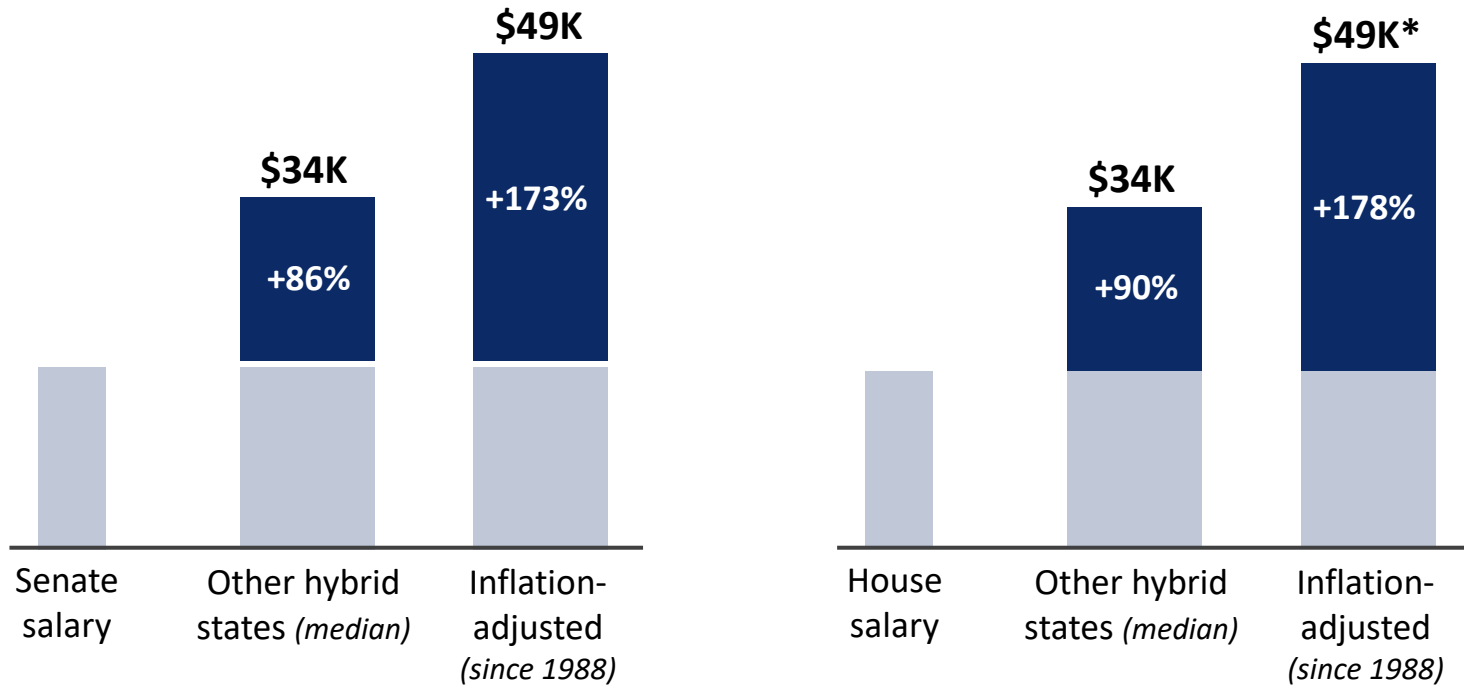


Less than 10% of legislators agreed salary was fair in context of time and effort required

- “This is not a part time position and with the pay we receive it is really only viable for the rich and retired. The inability to support my family will be a deciding factor on my ability to run for reelection.”
- “Low compensation creates barriers that limit legislative participation to those who are independently wealthy, retired, or otherwise well-connected enough to afford two months away from regular employment.”

Source: JLARC survey of Virginia legislators, November 2024.

Salaries should be increased; two benchmarks provide a range for consideration



*Inflation-adjusted House salary, if adjusted starting from the 2 percent reduction made in 1991, would be \$48,127 in 2024 dollars.













Recommendation


The General Assembly may wish to consider amending the Appropriation Act to increase legislative salaries.

Virginia's ad hoc process to determine legislative salaries has been inadequate

- History has shown that General Assembly has been reluctant to raise salaries
- Other states have systematic approaches to periodically address legislative salaries
 - Commissions
 - External benchmarks

External benchmark approach to determining legislative salaries over time likely best approach

Criteria	Ad hoc (Virginia)	External benchmark	Commission
1. Preserves salary value over time			
2. Transparent process and basis			
3. Flexibility to pause or reduce			
4. Inability for legislators to directly influence or determine salary amount			

=Fully meets

=Partially meets

=Does not meet

Recommendation

The General Assembly may wish to consider amending the Code of Virginia to

- (i) increase legislative salaries biennially based on an external benchmark
- (ii) allow General Assembly to nullify increase if deemed necessary based on adverse economic circumstances

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Mileage reimbursements & session per diem: Seem appropriate, no basis to recommend changes

- All other states also provide mileage reimbursements, and many (40) provide a session per diem
- Virginia appropriately determines these amounts
 - Calculated by the U.S. General Services Administration
 - Automatically adjusted over time based on costs

Interim meeting compensation: Seems appropriate, no basis to recommend changes

- Many states (40) provide some type of compensation during the interim between sessions
- Virginia's is based on meeting attendance and has periodically increased over time (last change in 2019)
- Amount of interim compensation members receive varies

	Senate	House
# of interim meetings attended (median)	16	8.5
Total interim compensation \$ (median)	\$4,600	\$2,450

Interim meeting information shown is three-year average of 2019, 2022, and 2023, which was used to exclude outlier pandemic years and smooth variation due to special sessions.

District office allowance:

Value eroded; most legislators consider inadequate

- Majority (28) of other states provide some type of funding for district office expenses
- Value of Virginia's district office allowance has substantially eroded (-140% of value) since last increase in 1998
- Most Virginia legislators strongly disagreed (49%) or somewhat disagreed (22%) that district office allowance was adequate
- Amount could be increased over time based on inflation or regional office costs

Source: JLARC survey of Virginia legislators, November 2024.

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